Visual learning in the community school

Sharing a common vision: community learning for community futures

Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Learning for Creative Futures

Creative Partnerships

The series *Visual learning in the community school* tells some of the many stories of partnerships that have increased school children's access to creative learning opportunities in 2003 and 2004. Oral language, visual literacies and strategic thinking were the focus of the research on which this series of booklets is based. The on-going study results from the collaboration of Creative Partnerships and scholars Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf, supported through Stanford University and Brown University.

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Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf
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– *Art is all about looking: drawing and detail*
– *Hoping for accidents: media and technique*
– *With an eye on design: the power of presentation*
– *It looks to me as if: talking about picture books*
– *Sharing a common vision: community learning for community futures*

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Visual learning in the community school **narrates one year (2003-2004) in which several types of creative bridging and partnering took place within Hythe Community School in Hythe, Kent. Behind these links were the inspiration and support of Creative Partnerships. Central roles in this tale are played by visual artist Roy Smith and architectural designer Ben Kelly. As resident artist, Roy Smith spent one day a week at Hythe Community School during the academic year. Ben Kelly and members of his design team worked together with the children to design the reception area of the new school building. But this narrative is also decidedly shaped by the play, faith, humour, curiosity, and tenacity of many more characters. The children take on new roles beyond that of pupil as they enact, remember, and promote their triumphs and set-backs. They do so in the company of teachers, parents, administrators, and community supporters, who delight in asking questions rather than giving answers. The storytellers are Shelby Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath who added their questions in order to capture, count, and recount the language and thinking behind creative work and play. Here the two researchers tell of the shifts in language and ways of thinking that lie behind the sustained power of creative learning that holds out new roles for all partners. Each of the five booklets within** ***Visual learning in the community school*** **takes readers behind the relationships, risks, and probabilities of the many adventures possible in** ***Learning for Creative Futures.***

The air smells of the sea—damp and salty—and the sea gulls sail overhead or perch on rooftops, barking their cries and turning sharp-eyed to survey the scene below. Mothers, fathers, and grandparents with babes in arms, and many, many young children walk through the early morning light to Hythe Community School. Some walk along the promenade that borders the sea of this "frontline" town—for Hythe was one of Kent's original Cinque Ports nominated in the 11th century by Edward the Confessor to defend the English coastline. Others descend from the High Street and cross over a bridge that spans the Royal Military Canal, built in the early 19th century as a defense against Napoleon. Still others wend their way through the streets of seaside homes, with window boxes and small gardens spilling over with flowers.

The children all sport sea-green sweatshirts bearing the seal of Hythe— its sailing ships of old encircled with the Latin legend that translates "The Seal of the Commonalty and Barons of Hythe." The fact that Hythe means *haven* and the word *community* is centred in the school's name is more than a nod toward naming a desired identity, for the school is, above all, a safe and stimulating haven for people.

When asked why community is so critical for the school, Hythe's Family Liaison Officer, Nick Lord, explains, "We work particularly hard to make the school a bigger part of the community. It's not about buildings, even though we've got a lot going on there. It's all about people."

Thus, the task of sorting out boundaries of the usual kinds that work in and with schools is

impossible. Indeed, Hythe Community School is dedicated to the idea of bringing parents and very young children into the nourishing life of the school. The Early Years Centre provides a nursery for infants who are cuddled and carried throughout the day, when they are not sleeping in the lovely light of a lavender room. The toddlers build with blocks, climb elaborate structures, and sit down with their teachers for a story, while they munch on their snacks. Older children can join the Breakfast Club that takes place in the Early Years Centre. They then begin their days not only with juice, cereal, and milk, but also with music, books, and toys. Parents volunteer in the kitchen along with the teachers to help offset the minimal price of the meal.

Parents with children up to the age of one as well as pregnant mums can join the Baby and Parents Group, where they can learn the art of baby massage as well as share moments of pride and anxiety they may have about their infants. Parents with slightly older children can join the Parent and Toddler Group, where the posted advertisement reads: “Lots of messy play and other activities, not to mention the singing!” In addition, families can join in any number of special classes and trips, from a GCSE (General Council Secondary Education) English preparation class, to a session on “Understanding Children,” to a lunchtime cookery class, to a “Dads R Us” night out, or a family trip to Disneyland Paris.

In the previous four booklets, we’ve talked about Hythe’s involvement in the visual arts, including the children’s drawing, experimentation with multiple media, interest in presentation and design, and learning through picturebooks. This final booklet will explore Hythe’s emphasis on community—creating a common vision for parents, children, teachers, and artists. All these key agents in the children’s lives have the goal that learning environments—from home to school and beyond—will blend

Teachers convey and model their respect for children's thinking in creative and collaborative projects.

together creating the strongest possible support for building a learning community for all. Language use comes with the constant sustainment and expansion from Hythe's many possibilities of seeing, singing, dancing, listening, and working together creatively.

Teachers convey and model their respect for children's thinking in creative and collaborative projects that give the children ample time to consider, construct, and communicate their learning. As Headteacher, Carolyn Chivers, emphasizes: "It's their space." But that space easily expands, as parents, artists, carpenters, designers, and older children from the junior school enter Hythe Community School. The larger world comes to be seen by parents, teachers, and children as merely part of the expanding bounty of their immediate space.

Creating a common vision

Around the corner from the Breakfast Club, those who are entering their first year of school gather at the door with their parents. An excited air of anticipation marks their entry into the classroom. With the help of their mums and dads, the children hang their coats, turn in their book bags, put away their packed lunches, and many times lead their parents to a piece of artwork, a special book or toy or a corner of the room where they like to play. Together, parents and children talk about what happened yesterday or last week or opportunities for learning that are sure to come today and every day.

Soon parents say good-bye and go off to work or other responsibilities. On some days, they stand chatting outside, their faces framed by the classroom windows. Years ago, Hythe's Headteacher Carolyn Chivers and Early Years Manager Nicky Hill met while dropping their children off at school. They became friends and have remained friends ever since. They both became teachers in the school and later moved into the more administrative positions they hold today. As mums, as teachers, and as administrators, they've seen every aspect of the school, and talking with them brings out a world of shared experience. They share a delightful sense of humour, making faces and telling stories of Hythe over the years. And as old friends, they often finish each other's sentences or their talk blends with similar expressions. They share a philosophy that children learn best through creative and collaborative projects that feature play.

The mission statement of the school sums up their goals as "working together to achieve excellence." When we asked Carolyn about this, she explained:

> I want every child in this school to do the best that they can. I want every child in this school to have every opportunity that they

can. And I want the adults who are working with the children in this school to look at themselves alongside of looking at children. That's the most effective way to change things for children. And I believe very strongly that if we get the curriculum right for these children, then they will do their very best.

When we asked her to describe the "right curriculum," Carolyn told us about a meeting she and Nicky had attended when they were teachers. They met Tina Bruce (2001), an Early Years educator who discussed the need for children—even very young children—to do things for themselves. Carolyn laughingly said, "Nicky and I both just chatted with her, and we came away—It's terrible when you get in a car together! And we were, 'This is just so wrong. We're not actually giving our children what they need.'" The very next day, they spoke to their Headteacher and got permission to try out their new ideas for one term. They spent their holiday rearranging everything in their early years programme.

They set up play centres, art corners, and writing areas; they built comfortable places for reading and looking at picturebooks. But books were not isolated to just one area; instead, they were widely distributed about the classroom. The focus on language was everywhere. A current centre in the Reception class on pirates has a small boat with oars, pirate hats, parrots, hooks for hands, and eye patches. But it also has a display of pirate words like "Shiver me timbers," "Ahoy, matey," and "skull and crossbones" as well as a number of books on buccaneers.

At Hythe, children have opportunities to do things for themselves and to talk to adults about *what* they are doing and *how* they are doing it.

Indeed, as Carolyn explained, "Everything in Reception centres around books."

Carolyn and Nicky designed the day's instruction integrating whole class teaching with group work, and they opened each day with an introduction and provided a plenary at the end. Most important, as Carolyn made clear: "There were big chunks of the day for child-initiated learning. But it wasn't child-initiated learning where they just went off and chose and played. It was more about interaction with adults. Our teachers and aides all do quite extensive observations of the children, and they keep very extensive profiles so they know exactly where they are and exactly where they want to move them on."

As Carolyn described it, the shift in curriculum, instruction, and assessment that she and Nicky designed was an immediate hit:

> We started just as the term started and the children—you could see a difference in two days. And the behaviour! Because children were then getting a curriculum that was right for them, there were no behaviour problems. They had opportunities to do things for themselves and to talk to adults about what they were doing and how they were doing it, and adults had the opportunity to move them forward. You know, suddenly, it was a whole new different place. And slowly it began moving through the whole building, from the Reception to Years One and Two. And our SATS results have just gone up and up and up and up. It's not clever really. It's just what we know is right for little children.

Knowing what's right for little children means listening to children, and the Hythe teachers have learned to listen well. As their children go about their daily work, the teachers often sit with them and discuss their ideas. They make open places for children's decision-making and provide ample space for children's talk. English drama educator Dorothy

Hythe Community School Newsletter
Monday 30th June 2003

Dates for the Diary

- Reports to parents: 4th July
- Parent / Staff Conferences: -7th & 8th July (letters went out last week)
- Meet your new teacher day: 11th July
- Last day of term : Wednesday 23rd July
- First day Autumn term: 3rd September
- Half Term Autumn term: 27th-31st Oct

SATs Results

Our SATs results for this year have been to the county audit and have been confirmed. They are our best results ever, we are really proud of the children in Year 2 who have done so well and the Governors and I are really proud of the teachers in all year groups who have worked so hard to achieve such wonderful results. Remember that level 2 is the average for children at the end if Key Stage One and level 3 is the level expected by the average nine year old.

SATS RESULTS 2003	
WRITING TASK	
LEVEL 2+	95%
LEVEL 3	10%
READING TEST	
LEVEL2+	97%
LEVEL 3	38%
MATHS TEST	
LEVEL 2+	96%
LEVEL 3	46%

Individual SATs results will be included on the Annual Reports which will be sent home on Friday.

Email addresses

Email your child at school Initial and surname first e.g. **ajones@hythe-infant.kent.sch.uk**
Then send an email to Angela Marriott to make sure someone helps your child access the messag: amarriott@hythe-infant.kent.sch.uk

HAVE - A - GO DRUM SHOW
Mark Walker who comes to school to do a really exciting drum show is about to present a show at the Purcell Rooms at the Royal Festival Hall. It will be held on the 26th July at 11.30. Tickets are £12 for a family ticket (2 adults and 2 children or 1 adult and 3 children) or £6 for adults and £3 for children. Tickets can be purchased from the Royal Festival Hall Box office on 020 7960 4242

Mid Day Supervisor Required for Hythe Community School From September
If you are interested talk to Siobhan in the office

Do you want a job at lunchtime?
Initial Catering have two vacancies for lunchtime staff at this school. It is term time only, so fits in well with the children. If you are interested in the jobs phone 01634 719113.

Class Assemblies
Class Assemblies will start again this week. We do not have them during SATs, life is very hectic at that time
4th July- Tigers
11th July- MEET THE TEACHER DAY no assembly
18th July- Whales
23rd JulY- Leavers Assembly- 2.15pm
Class Assemblies start at 2.30

DRAMA CLUB
There will be no drama club on 4th July
Louise is moving house!

Heathcote (1984) argues, "the teacher, as the most mature member of the group, has not merely a right but a responsibility to intervene, since learning is the product of intervention" (p. 12).

As in Heathcote's work, the intervention of the Hythe teachers often comes in questions posed to children rather than directives. As Year Two teacher Sharon Lewis explained: "I don't feel like a teacher. I feel like an instigator!" Once when working on a project with a group of her six and seven-year-olds, Sharon talked with young Dylan who was building a model of a computer:

Dylan: There. I've done the plug. But I haven't done the computer keys. How can I do the keys?
Sharon: Well, let's go over and have a look. [They went over to study the classroom's real computer.]
Dylan: Right! Yes! Well, I could draw the keys on there.
Sharon: Will your keys move?
Dylan: No.
Sharon: How could you do that?
Let's go and have a look at our Haunted House books, and we'll have a look at the pop-up parts. [They moved again, but this time to the book corner and began studying the workings of the pop-up books, which had paper springs to allow for particular pieces to spring up from the page.]
Dylan: I could do that zigzaggy thing, and then when you press it, it'll move. When you press the keys, they'll move.

At the end of this discussion, Sharon told us: "The children never cease to amaze me with their ideas." But we were equally impressed with Sharon's clever questions, and the way she moved Dylan easily from his computer model, to the real computer, to the pop-up books, and back once again to his creation, now equipped with an inventive new idea for how to make his model even more authentic.

In addition to listening to children's talk, the Hythe teachers often take notes on their commentary. In

every class, we saw teachers sitting quietly with groups of children, listening, and writing down direct quotes from their speech. Sharon explained, "Yes, we always make notes. Sometimes we type them up and stick them up on the wall. We've got children's quotes everywhere." Moreover, based on their notes, teachers plan together for individual children.

Reception teachers Steph Hammond and Deb Walkling keep daily observation sheets, taking down observations on at least three or four children a day and noting their level of involvement. Steph explained, "We literally record exactly what we see them do, and we think about implications for where they need to go next." They then translate this information into their literacy and numeracy assessment sheets as well as charts on their children's creative and social development. And they act on their ongoing assessment. If they see that a child has trouble understanding prepositions one afternoon, by the next morning they'll have an activity planned with a teddy bear and a doll bed. They'll ask the child: can you put the teddy bear beside the bed? Under the bed? How about on the bed?

This careful attention to children's language and learning takes time, but the Hythe teachers are willing to give it, though Carolyn and Nicky do everything they can to give teachers time to think. When we asked Steph what made Hythe unique, she responded:

> The staff. Everyone's very kind and considerate and aware of each other's feelings. You don't feel isolated. It's not as if you're in your room, you shut the door, and get on with it. We have so much time—planning time. Nicky teaches for me on a Tuesday. And if you are having a bad day, you always feel you can talk about it. And to be honest, in this school all we do is talk. There's always feedback on lessons or after something's happened.

"The children never cease to amaze me with their ideas."

“If you’ve got a person right at the top, who has that level of commitment, it’s infectious.”

Steph’s colleague, Deb Walkling, agreed. Talking about her love of the school, her eyes filled with tears: “Because it is just so special. Everybody just cares so much.”

When we asked Hythe’s Family Liaison Officer similar questions, Nick felt the answer lay in the leadership:

> Carolyn’s so committed to the school, and I think that filters all the way down. If you’ve got that person right at the top, who has that level of commitment, it’s infectious. And the senior management team, which I’m lucky enough to be a part of, has that same level of commitment. It’s really all about the people. You know, Carolyn went to a lecture in London by the man who wrote the book about emotional intelligence. He said that one of the things that top people do, and I think Carolyn’s probably done this, is that you employ like-minded people. She’s built up a team around her that thinks the way she does, that has the same objectives she has. And that’s why it works. That’s why there’s this buzz about the place.

Indeed, Daniel Goleman (2000), the expert in emotional intelligence Carolyn heard, suggests:

> The rules for work are changing. We’re being judged by a new yardstick; not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other…These rules have little to do with what we were told was important in school; academic abilities are largely irrelevant to this standard. The new measure takes for granted having enough intellectual ability and technical know-how to do our jobs; it focuses instead on personal qualities, such as initiative and empathy, adaptability and persuasiveness.

While it may seem enough that the staff’s like-minded thinking shows initiative, empathy, and adaptability, the Hythe teachers and administrators don’t stop to rest on their laurels. Instead, they work persistently and persuasively to draw the larger Hythe community into their thinking in social as well as academic ways.

Building bridges in the community

On a cold and humid day in January, the sky threatening snow, Year Two teacher Tracy Green invited a group of Year Four children from Saint Leonard's, the junior school down the road, to come to Hythe and build bridges. She laid out a glorious assortment of materials— cardboard tubes, cereal and other boxes, blocks, art straws, wood pieces, LEGO and K'NEX construction pieces, glue, staples, markers, pens, enough sellotape to wrap the classroom, and, of course, numerous books on bridges. Working together in mixed-aged groups, the children selected their materials and went to work. They built models both large and small, and tested the strength of their bridges by bouncing dolls across them and making toy cars zoom from place to place. When one group of children saw that their bridge had gaps their test car couldn't cross, Diane Scott, an aide in the classroom commented, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Building bridges is not just a specific activity for children on a winter afternoon. At Hythe, it's a metaphor for the kind of work members of the community do all the time to link themselves to the larger community. If as a school, they see gaps in their communication they have not bridged, they put their heads together to figure out what to do about it. One answer, as teacher Sharon Lewis explained, is that they try to make the school a One-Stop-Shop:

> Children are dropped off at nursery. Mum comes in and does a class on flower arranging or Maths GCSE. Dad comes into a parenting class for dads, a mechanical class, anything! We work with what the parents want as well as what we kind of feel that they would like to do. Some of that's been very formal—GCSE classes, National Vocational Qualification certificates, and so on.They've just started a baby massage class. They do a Hair and Nail day, a Cookery Club. That's the idea of the One-Stop-Shop. It's very much about working in the community, in addition to our links with social services, health, and psychological services.

When Hythe gained status as an Early Excellence School—one of only one hundred in England—they got the funding to do even more. While much of the funding went into the new building, where the nursery and Reception classes are now housed in addition to the school's new reception area, the rest of the money went to community building. They started the Breakfast Club, the baby massage class, and created new jobs. Sharon summarized, "It's meant that we've been able to do things we really want to be able to do, especially working as part of the community. Building a community. Building our own history, really."

One of the new jobs they were able to fund was for Nick Lord, the Family Liaison Officer (FLO), who describes his job as a "sign poster to point people in the right directions." He continued:

> It's a role that is defined, but it's very wide in that we're here to help families, rather than just the children. So if there's a family crisis, however big or small, then there's somewhere for that person to go within the school environment. And the money is given to improve the welfare, not just the education, but the welfare of children and their families, whether parents need help with their housing or just a shoulder to cry on.

While Nick spends a good proportion of his time providing counselling for families who have critical issues, he also organises events that help him get closer to the parents. He elaborated:

> It gives the parents an opportunity to come and talk to me, and they're not necessarily being looked at. You know like, "Oh, they're talking to Nick. There must be something wrong. They've got a problem." Because they could be talking to me about any number of different things—something to do with the baby group, or the trip to the pantomime that we did last Friday, or the trip that we're planning for the summer. Or it could be an activity we're going to do in half term. Or it could be because they have a real problem. And nobody needs to know which one it is.

As a result, Nick is a jack-of-all-trades in family learning. Parents and children know he is there for play, for assistance in a range of projects, and as a listener and connector. He greets children and cooks in the Breakfast Club, runs parenting classes, and works with Karen King, the school's Special Needs Co-ordinator, to help access special services for a child appearing to need additional support. He also edits *Nick's News*, the weekly newsletter.

Because he divides his time between Hythe and the junior school, he's especially helpful when the Year Two children graduate and get ready to move to St. Leonard's and from there on to Brockhill Park, the secondary school up the hill. Nick is a storyteller and reader, and he sings right along in the Parent and Toddler group, often leading the gestures and handclaps that go with each song. His unabashed willingness to join in and his presence as a male brings fathers, granddads, and other male relatives into a climate of comfort around young children.

Building bridges with books

Another way that Hythe builds bridges in the community is with books. In the summer of each year before the onset of autumn term, the Reception teachers visit the homes of each and every one of their incoming children. They ask parents to put balloons outside their doors on the day of their visit, which helps them locate the homes, but also adds festivity to the occasion, for the children think it's like a birthday party. When the teachers come, they bring one of the *Getting Ready for School* packs that we described in the booklet entitled *It Looks to me as if: talking about picturebooks*.

The Red Pack, for example, is about learning to get dressed and about colour. It is about matching and sorting as well as naming colours. Included in this pack are suggestions for activities that range from sorting the washing and matching the coloured socks to listening to songs and rhymes about colour, in this case "Little Boy Blue." The teachers bring a book and a musical tape to go along with the various activities. The page in the pack devoted to books emphasises that reading with children should be a time of comfort and enjoyment. The Hythe teachers suggest that there is a lot for children to learn before they can read for themselves, including telling stories about the pictures, acting out stories, pretending to read to dolls and teddies, and most significantly, watching an adult read. They encourage the parents not only to read the book they've brought with the Red Pack several times, but also to read other books as well.

During this home visit, the teachers also give the parents blank diaries. Reception teacher Deb Walkling explained:

> It's a new idea. There are some things we don't know about the children, even though we do know them very well. And

maybe if we had a diary, which becomes like a scrapbook of the child's year, we could perhaps pick up on some things that we missed about their interests. So, when we went home visiting, we took these books and said, "Well, they look horrible. You know, do whatever you like to them to jazz them up. They're yours, and if you do anything special as a family or holidays, birthdays—please put them in."

Photographs, drawings, recipes, short stories written by family members, and many other items find their way into these diaries, which come to the school on a regular basis. Deb and Steph read the diaries every week and add their own observations, questions, ideas, and reflections.

A similar practice, developed by the Reggio Emilia programmes in Italy, was the inspiration for the Hythe Community School family diaries. These tell stories and portray images and emotions as the children learn through family interests, uses of leisure time, and holidays or even emergency visits to a sick relative. Through their weekly reading of the diaries, teachers come to know the names of pets, playmates, or favourite cousins. The Hythe children like to bring their family members to school to see their projects, and teachers can welcome these guests, often by name, after seeing their photographs in the diaries. Similarly, when teachers add comments and photos of activities done in school, parents gain information about events, friends, and challenges, as well

The diaries bridge home and school in their content, but also through the emphasis on listening to and extending children's talk.

as successes of their children. These connecting points from teachers to families build upon the insights gained in the initial home visits and offer a continuous story of the children's learning across environments.

What especially marks the parent/child/teacher interactions around the diaries is *language*. Talk among adults and children surrounds the choice of photographs, the stories of family life they want to tell, and the activities from school they want to communicate. New vocabulary, as well as decisions about linking words with pictures of familiar people, activities, and places, lay important foundations for talk about learning. Thus, the diaries bridge home and school in their content, but also through the emphasis on listening to and extending children's talk. As children and adults talk together about past events, times and places of people's lives, and plan for future events, they widen the linguistic worlds of young children.

One other kind of book makes the journey there and back again between children's homes and school several times a week—the Hythe children's link books. In the Reception classes, these little tablets go into the children's book bag accompanied by two picturebooks—one for the children to read to their parents and one for the parents to read to their four and five-year-olds. The Reception teachers begin the cycle by meeting with every child in their classroom once a week. During these meetings, the teachers read to and with the children, and they take notes on their interactions in the link books. In a session with Lewis, for example, Steph wrote: "Lewis read really well and answered some clever questions." Once the picturebooks and link books go home, parents do the same, adding their own insights into their children's reading. On the inside cover of the link books are specific instructions for the parents on ideas for reading with their children, and it's especially important to again note the strong emphasis on children's language,

suggesting that parents encourage their children to talk about the pictures as well as think about possible predictions.

Storybooks and the set-aside time for their reading place a "double stop-action" on the pace of the world (Wolf & Heath, 1992). The first stop-action comes from the fact that the time for book reading halts the normal flow of activity of both adult and child. A second stop-action results from the fact that, unlike the continual and relatively undesignated pace of everyday life, picturebooks frame page-by-page words and pictures to make them hold still indefinitely and stand ready for repeated revisits. Since the books are to be shared for at least ten minutes every evening, they offer the children repeated opportunities to notice details, comment on character, and ponder about what they might do if faced with the same situation. And because the link books hold writing from both parents and teachers, children not only hear about their accomplishments, but they see the value of written language for the adults in their world.

Building bridges through projects

Of all the bridge building that occurs at Hythe Community School, some of the most important structures spring from projects. A recent fad in education, *projects* are often praised, and many classrooms involve children in projects from time to time. But Hythe teachers are never faddish about their approach to curriculum. Instead, their projects reflect a true *community bridge*. Over the year of working with artist-in-residence Roy Smith, the children of Hythe engaged in many art projects. And of course, the long-term project of designing the reception area for the new building involved a team of children of all ages working with designer Ben Kelly. Still, a more typical example of community bridges stems from the *Our Space, Our Place* project that Year Two teachers Claire McIllroy and Sharon Lewis did in a two-week period over summer term.

Central to this project is the process of problem-solving and planning, which involves learners in seeing ahead as well as drawing on past experiences and taking in what is in the here and now. Projects ensure that all steps and every item and person involved receive attention and are taken into account. Sharon and Claire had received the *Our Space, Our Place* materials from the Primary Excellence Project in Kent. This curriculum centres on children choosing an aspect of the local space to study, exploring and expressing responses to that space, and sharing their response in some public way.

True to their unique teaching styles, Claire and Sharon met often to plan for this project together, but they took different directions. Sharon emphasised *permanence*, hoping her children would construct something that would commemorate a place in the school or community of their choosing. Claire, on the other hand, emphasised *function,*

The children saw themselves as thoughtful designers, whom adults should consult.

asking her children to consider what places and spaces were used for and how they might be improved. To help her children, they went on a long walkabout through Hythe visiting the fire station, the beach, the football pitch, and the local library as well as drawing these scenes in their sketchbooks. Claire explained:

> They really didn't know very much about where particular places were. Why they were there? Who went there? Why did they go there? Whereas today, they sketched it while looking at it, saw where it was, the people who went there— all those things they couldn't explain yesterday, they could today.

In terms of function and change, Claire's children had a number of ideas for the children's room at the local library. Seven year-old Fern spoke for her group: "Well, we don't like how it's decorated. It's just an adult's done it. It's nothing that we've done." Pointing to a decoration on the wall, Holly added, "Well, I wouldn't have that on the wall. I'd have characters from children's books." Fern countered, "Well I would have pictures of people reading different kinds of books." Their comments reflect their recent experience with designing the reception area with Ben Kelly. They'd been asked their opinions in that project and they acted on them, offering many ideas for colours, for patterns, and for furniture. Weeks later, they still saw themselves as thoughtful designers, whom adults should consult before constructing a place that they think children will like. Comments from Fern and Holly on the children's room at the library show how children gain valuable experience in past projects, and take that experience with them as they think about the project up ahead.

These children provide supporting evidence for their proposals of change. They suggest a course of action, how it should be taken, and why the suggested change is preferred over the current situation. These are the language and thinking skills that formal

schooling requires more and more as children move into the junior and secondary schools. Tests require such thinking, to be sure, but even more important is the fact that this kind of thinking keeps families working out problems together, knowing ways of getting help, and thinking critically and creatively about alternative approaches and solutions.

In Sharon's class, the children worked on the *Our Space, Our Place* project with a focus on permanence and problem-solving. Sharon read them a story about a rabbit that had a problem. She then took them through a chart that outlined the obstacles and solutions the rabbit met and resolved. She explained that just like the rabbit, the children would need to consider the obstacles and possible solutions for problems they encountered in creating their commemorative art. For example, Eilish was going to create a song about the book corner in the classroom, and the big problem for her was to think of a song. Sharon said:

> Wow! How could you possibly solve that? What could you do to think of a song? It could be that you ask someone to help you. It could be that you listen to other songs to get some ideas. It could be that you talk to someone and say, "Listen to this! What do you think? Do you think I need to change it?"

Sharon's question series offers a range of solutions all marked by "could be." She did not offer *the solution*; instead, she provided several routes to sources of information and skills for Eilish's proposed project.

As the children worked on their projects over the next few days, they encountered many problems, and they had to think quite hard about potential solutions. Anthony, for example, decided he wanted to celebrate himself in school. At first, he developed the idea of a portrait of his huge happy face on a balloon, but he soon realized that it might pop, and he would have to keep remaking it. His project's potential for permanence was

Project planning clearly depends on bringing into the present "what I learned from the past."

minimal. As Sharon explained, "Although it was fun, he would never have something tangible at the end of it." Anthony then decided to make a key ring. On his planning sheets he wrote, "I got my idea from a monkey key ring from Port Lympne."

Anthony also wanted to duplicate his key ring for "every member of his family." He said, "You know when you get your photo done for your passport? I could draw it four times, or I could photocopy it." To make his idea even more permanent, he decided to laminate his rings based on his recall of the laminated bookmarks they made for Mother's Day. Again, on his planning sheets he wrote, "When we were at art club, I liked that thing we used for our Mother's Day presents. I could copier it, then laminate it, and wola! [Voila!] Done!" When Sharon asked him how his choice would celebrate his memories of being happy in school, he replied: "Because you can look at your key ring when you're older and remember your special place."

What we hear in the children's words and through Sharon's guidance is a movement back and forth across past, present, and future. Children get to use the past tense and link the past through connecting words that express how they see what happened then as relating to the current conversation or task. Thus, project planning clearly depends on bringing into the present "what I learned from the past." As children move in their language and in their cognitive work back and forth across time, conditions, and places of possible steps or objects in projects, they gain practice in understanding causality, sequence, and accident [see the booklet *Hoping for accidents: media and technique*].

While many young children talk freely about what is directly in front of them, in the *Our Space, Our Place* project as well as in other projects the Hythe children worked on with teachers, Roy Smith, and Ben Kelly, they used a great variety of verb forms. These verb forms came with words that worked as

... as children move fluently across verb forms and types of connectors in language, they show their engagement in projects.

connections. Sometimes these were conjunctions, such as *and* or *but*; at other times, connectors such as *when, because, so*, and *then* began to show up more often in their language. These words indicate advancement in the cognitive work of linking across barriers of time and place, building an idea or visualizing in one's head an image of what could happen. Learning is very much linked to understanding process, factors of influence as well as impediment, and consequences of actions. Saying out loud what goes into each of these links helps children learn to rerun these talking scripts in their own heads as they find and solve other problems or propose other creative projects.

Most importantly, as children move fluently across verb forms and types of connectors in language, they show their engagement in projects. When they do so, they reflect their growing perception of themselves as learners, as agents that can make things happen. A sense of being able to make things happen and to show what one has done and what one can do builds strong students. Starting very young children on the route toward seeing themselves as capable project designers, builders, and critics builds their readiness for moving through academic challenges and also for being better members of their communities.

Because the *Our Space, Our Place* projects were meant to be shared with the larger community, Year Two teachers Sharon Lewis and Claire McIllroy had their children assemble their completed projects in the hall, and the parents came to view their children's work. Of all the places and spaces the children chose to commemorate, the football pitch was the most popular. Even in the initial sketches the children drew on their walkabout through town, Claire noticed a distinct feature of their drawings: "There they are in the picture with their friends. They're doing things, they're using the place, rather than just seeing it as a static thing an adult has designed that they don't know very much about." In their hall exhibition for parents, Jack played his recording of "Football Crazy," a song he composed and sang with a group of his buddies. Joe and Louis had built a three-dimensional model of a football game, pitting Manchester United against Aston Villa. They positioned little pipe-cleaner men on a piece of poster board that served as a field, but instead of only professional players, the boys had put some of their mates into the game. They'd even put in fallen players including Jack Somerville, their classmate who wrote the Football Crazy song. Jack's pipe-cleaner figure had been fouled and was flat on his face. The boys explained that the other player who fouled him, received a "red card" for his play and he'd "get sent off." Most important, because he'd been fouled, Jack's goal would count. Joe and Louis had even used short blue straws to indicate a zigzag line of action as Jack's shot at the goal had zoomed into the net. The boys explained that the goalie had "dived and he missed. And so he didn't save it."

When parents and teachers questioned the boys about the problems they'd encountered in making their creation, Joe explained, "Well, when we started making it, everything started flopping over, you know." Louis added, "And then we couldn't find any more pipe cleaners. And so we borrowed some from the Dolphins" [Claire's class next door]. They decided to use short straw pieces as supports for the players, but one of the pipe-cleaner figures, no matter how hard they tried, kept flopping over. Ultimately, they decided to leave him down. As Louis explained, "It's because it never would stand up…so we just let it be down and be fouled." But rather than leave the story there, the boys took it even further and made up an entire narrative starring Jack Sommerville, their mate, being fouled, yet still managing to make a critical goal.

Questions of support came up again and again for the children. Kieran, for example, built a football pitch net—a large contraption that stood almost as high as his head.

At the exhibition, Kieran's father and grandmother came to admire, and they even tested the functionality of the net by playing a quick game of football, with grandma shooting and Kieran as goalie. Chatting with Kieran's family, Sharon said, "It kept toppling over, and he knew that he had to support it. He knew he needed something here, but we didn't have anything long enough in the classroom." Kieran agreed, adding that he created the crossbars "to keep it from falling over since my biggest problem was finding a way to keep the posts up." As a result, Kieran taped together several toilet paper rolls and used them as supports. Looking over the net, Kieran's grandmother exclaimed: "I wondered why he'd been in the bathroom all that time! We don't have any middles in our new rolls. Tell Ms. Lewis why we don't have middles in the new rolls." Unfazed by the missing middles, Kieran's father approved of his son's ingenious way of constructing his net and said, "That's fantastic, son." And the bridge to community was complete.

Summary

In the 18th century, in several places throughout England, clusters of community members came together to build all types of mutual benefit societies. It could well be that in the future, in addition to special institutions of learning, families, teachers, children, health care support, and other entities committed to learning will cluster together and enrol entire neighbourhoods (Atkinson, 1994; see also several plans and possibilities for the creativity and citizen growth that such learning communities promise in Brickell, 2000 and New Economics Foundation, 2000). Learning communities depend on engagement in common experiences, joint exploration of challenges, and access to experts or specialists in a range of fields. At Hythe Community School, the Breakfast Club, the cookery club, the GCSE classes, the baby massage class, the Parent and Toddler group, and many other times of coming together to work and learn with children represent all of these key components in fusion.

Among biologists, it is common to point to the ways in which communities of the natural world work effectively. Within ecosystems, scientists constantly demonstrate how adaptation takes place. Hybrids and new offshoots emerge from the process of being together in a changing environment. Independence and separation from being needed by those around us work against adaptation, creative alternatives, and evolution of interdependence in new relationships. Hythe Community School believes that only in caring enough to join together creatively to foster the young as they grow into a sense of community can individuals be fully themselves.

Connectedness—of visual art, music, poetry, play—surround and support the continuities of infant to primary pupil, teacher to

As individuals work together, they provide one another stability and protection, reinforcement for talents, and ideas for new learning.

pupil, parent to teacher, parent to parent, and parent and children in community with their school and in pointing children toward the worlds of further learning and work.

Together, learning goes on, and as these individuals work together, they provide one another stability and protection, reinforcement for talents, and ideas for new learning. Boundaries fall away, and instead bridges form places of exchange and linking. A Reception age child works on her diary with her parents, and after reading about the week's events, her teacher adds a digital photo taken in the classroom along with a commentary on the child's success. Link books share similar celebrations of young children's reading as they move there and back again between school and the Hythe children's homes. At a public exhibition in the hall, a Year Two child plays a quick round of football with his grandmother, and when he and his teacher explain the problems he encountered in the construction and solved, his father looks on with admiration.

Integral to community are shared intent and basic principles of collaboration and learning mentorship. Every learner mentors any other learner. Tasks and challenges are so wide-ranging that no one knows how to do them all, and at Hythe the emphasis is on giving children an opportunity to figure things out. The children themselves challenge the design of the children's room at the local library. They have better ideas. A group of children who can't get their test car across a bridge looks to their adult aide for help, but her first response is "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Two boys build players on their football pitch model and run out of pipe cleaners. When they complain to their teacher, she asks, "Where could you get some more?" Indeed, most teacher talk consists of questions or of statements marked by "You could…" or "You might…" offering a range of hypothetical options.

Adults are there to help, but they ask their children to first think for themselves. Indeed, the idea of support—both literal and metaphorical—is everywhere, for at Hythe things are held up and made strong through multiple opportunities for language and learning.

The simplest and most complex statement about community is that only in community can we find care and caring (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard, & Schubert, 1998; McKnight, 1995). As we do, we regenerate our roles as citizens. Someone has said that it is only when knowing what being a true member of a community means that we can hear people singing. Harmony, synchrony, as well as point and counterpoint come alive in the vibrant songs of interaction in all the classrooms at Hythe Community School.

Along with their administrative leaders, parents, teachers, and children come together out of the desire for nurturing through the melodies of the ensemble there. Whether out of a desire for a good breakfast, aesthetic design, soothing music, a fine story, partnership in first-time parenting, or support in managing a child with special needs, members of the Hythe Community School look to one another to stay connected and focused, to listen, look, and learn. As the weeks from the beginning of the year wear on, all problems and differences do not disappear, but the core desire for communal help and learning carry on. It is in the openness of the school to learning and to blurring boundaries that the security of all its members grows more assured.

Within the history of England and in numerous places through the country today, learning communities go about their work in quiet and caring ways. One of the best-known in contemporary England is the Eden Project in Cornwall, devoted to embedding community and caring in learning about the interdependence of the

environment. On the wall of Eden's entrance are words that embrace Hythe Community School as well as other strongly committed learning communities throughout England that have taken up the challenge to serve as models of creativity in learning.

Work like you don't need the money,
Love like you've never been hurt,
Dance like nobody's watching,
Sing like nobody's listening,
Live like it's heaven on earth.

(Smit, 2001)

The heart of Hythe beckons. Its calls go far beyond the limits of money, energy, and imagination. In a mutual belief in creativity, contributions from diversity, and shared significance, Hythe Community School becomes more than its name. Like the ship on the Hythe seal, it sails through history as well as the here and now, and it follows the course set by its compass toward the creative futures of community.

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Design: Ranch

Creative Partnerships is a national government-funded organisation, managed by Arts Council England, committed to the positive development of young people through cultural practice and creative learning. The aim is to help develop the imaginations and skills of young people through meaningful and sustained cultural experiences in the formal and informal education sectors. Creative Partnerships currently works in 25 areas of England with a range of cultural practitioners, creative industries, businesses, and local government bodies.

Learning for Creative Futures is a series of publications for general, arts practice, and academic readerships, that portrays how learning environments engage children and adolescents in sustained creative work and play. Assuming roles and relationships that bring close association with professionals who work in creative industries, young learners experience the vital mix of imagination, long-term planning, knowledge accumulation, skill development, and informed critique. The international research team of *Learning for Creative Futures* includes scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, education, linguistics, psychology, political science, and sociology. This international enquiry network is led by Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf.

All stories have behind them many other stories. The tales told in this series are no exception. Behind *Visual learning in the community school* are the people and the contexts that give the qualities of character, time, setting, and energy to their narratives of creative learning.

Hythe Community School serves the seaside community of Hythe in Kent. The school provides education at the Foundation Stage (Reception Year and nursery children) and Year 1 and Year 2 ages 4-7 (following the Key Stage 1 curriculum). The school shares its site with Hythe Early Years Centre, which offers full-day and sessional care to children between the ages of 2 and 4 and follows the Foundation Stage Curriculum. Recognising the worth of each child and teacher, the school seeks to transform educational standards and raise achievement, through working with other educational establishments, parents, and the local community. Hythe Community School is a happy, safe and stimulating environment where all members of the community, adults as well as children, are valued as individuals and encouraged to work together. This community school aims to nurture within each person:

– a lifelong love of learning

– the desire to achieve the very best, to rise to a challenge and enjoy success

– the opportunity to speak out, listen to and respect others, sharing the knowledge, skills and understanding we need to live together in harmony within the community

– and the chance to look carefully, reflect on what we have learned and see that the world is a very special place.

Creative Partnerships Kent is run by a small, highly experienced team that has local, national, and international expertise in facilitating cultural and educational programmes. Team members believe in providing the highest quality and most challenging arts and cultural experiences for young people. To this end, they sought partnerships with The Sorrell Foundation (and thereby Ben Kelly Associates), Roy Smith, Shelby Wolf, and Shirley Brice Heath. The quality of work that has taken place is the result of an inspired school and exemplary practitioners who have seriously undertaken the challenge of partnering creatively with teachers, children, parents, and community. These booklets represent sharing of a common vision that extends from artist to administrator, teacher to researcher, adult to child. The experiences enjoyed by the children at Hythe are what Creative Partnerships wants for all children and believes is the entitlement of every child.

The research: From the spring of 2003 through the school year 2004, two scholars, Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Wolf, looked closely at how language, attention, inspiration, and collaboration within Hythe Community School changed through artistic partnership. Their work brought teachers, artists, and students into the research process as questioners, data interpreters, and readers and respondents assessing the results as set forth in this series of booklets. The research upon which *Visual learning in the community school* is based includes transcripts and fieldnotes recorded and analyzed during the year and reported here through thematic patterns. Academic publications of the *Learning for creative futures* series will report detailed comparative analyses of language and cognitive development in the context of specific features of creative learning environments.

Shirley Brice Heath, linguistic anthropologist, has studied how different kinds of learning environments support children's later language development. She takes as her focus within-school creative programmes as well as sustained interactions young people have in their work and play within families, peer relations, and community organisations. She is the author of the classic *Ways with words: language, life, and work in communities and classrooms* (Cambridge University Press, 1986/1996). Heath has taught at universities throughout the world—most notably Stanford University and Brown University, and currently as Visiting Professor at Kings College, University of London. Of emphasis in her research are the long-term effects of learning in environments heavily dependent on the arts. Within this work, she has given special attention to science and environmental projects, and those that encompass social justice concerns. Her resource guide and prize-winning documentary Art*Show* (2000) feature young leaders in four community arts organisations in the United States. www.shirleybriceheath.com

Shelby Wolf, an award-winning teacher and educational scholar, is a professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research centres on children's language and learning through engagement in literature and collaborative as well as creative modes of expression— discussion, writing, the visual arts, and drama. Her most recent book, *Interpreting literature with children* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), portrays her close work with teachers as co-researchers in the study of children's literary learning. She has worked within numerous school-change programmes to validate the perspectives of teachers who undertake enquiry into how learning works in their classrooms. She is a senior author of *Houghton Mifflin English* (2004), a textbook series devoted to helping children improve as writers. With Shirley Brice Heath, she wrote *The braid of literature: children's worlds of reading* (Harvard University Press, 1992). http://www.Colorado.edu/education/faculty/shelbywolf.

Sharing a common vision: community learning for community futures explores how the arts are used in Hythe Community School to engage parents, children, administrators, teachers and artists in creating a common vision for their school. Collaborative teacher-parent diaries of learning, and dedicated times for parental involvement in the arts, emphasise the importance of children's growing sense of themselves as learners and as creative thinkers with responsibilities for the quality of life and learning in their everyday lives.